

CLAIMS

What is claimed and desired to secure by Letters Patent is:

1. A process for collecting machine identifying information associated with a digital online access device used for substantially anonymously accessing a host computer system over a digital network, said host computer system generating an interaction record of an access therewith by said access device, and said process comprising the steps of:
 - (a) capturing a machine identifying profile parameter upon said access device accessing said host computer system;
 - (b) generating a unique interaction identification string upon said access device accessing said host computer system;
 - (c) associating said interaction identification string with said profile parameter; and
 - (d) associating said interaction identification string with said interaction record generated upon said access device accessing said host computer system.
2. A process as set forth in Claim 1 wherein said capturing step includes the step of:
 - (a) capturing a digital address of said access device on said digital network.
3. A process as set forth in Claim 1 wherein said capturing step includes the step of:
 - (a) capturing a configuration setting of said access device.

4. A process as set forth in Claim 1 and including the steps of:
 - (a) communicating a self-identification routine to said access device upon said access device accessing said host computer system;
 - (b) said access device executing said self-identification routine;
 - (c) said self-identification routine querying a configuration setting of said access device to derive said profile parameter; and
 - (d) said self-identification routine communicating said profile parameter to a remote location for association with said interaction identification string.
5. A process as set forth in Claim 1 and including the steps of:
 - (a) said host system operating a host web site including an interaction page generated by interaction page code processed by said access device upon accessing said host web site; and
 - (b) coding, within said interaction page code, a self-identification routine which causes said access device to communicate said profile parameter when said access device processes said interaction page code.
6. A process as set forth in Claim 3 and including the step of:
 - (a) coding said self-identification routine in such a manner that said profile parameter and said interaction identification string are communicated to a

third party web site at which said profile parameter and said interaction identification string are stored.

7. A process for identifying a customer computer involved in an online transaction between a customer using a customer browser operating on said customer computer and a merchant operating a merchant web site, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) capturing a customer computer profile parameter upon said customer computer accessing said merchant web site;
- (b) generating a transaction identification string and associating said string with said parameter;
- (c) storing said parameter and said string in a machine data archive;
- (d) upon said customer completing a transaction through said merchant web site, storing said transaction identification string with a transaction record formed during said transaction to thereby associate said parameter with said transaction record through said string.

8. A process as set forth in Claim 7 wherein said capturing step includes the step of:

- (a) capturing an IP address of said customer computer.

9. A process as set forth in Claim 7 wherein said capturing step includes the step of:
 - (a) capturing a configuration setting of said customer computer.
10. A process as set forth in Claim 7 and including the step of:
 - (a) communicating said profile parameter and said transaction identification string to a third party web site for storage.
11. A process as set forth in Claim 7 and including the step of:
 - (a) causing said customer computer to communicate said profile parameter and said transaction identification string to a third party web site for storage.
12. A process as set forth in Claim 7 and including the steps of:
 - (a) communicating a self-identification routine to said customer computer upon said customer computer accessing said merchant web site;
 - (b) said customer computer executing said self-identification routine;
 - (c) said self-identification routine querying a configuration setting of said customer computer to derive said profile parameter; and
 - (d) said self-identification routine communicating said profile parameter to a remote location for association with said interaction identification string.

13. A process as set forth in Claim 12 and including the step of:
- (a) coding said self-identification routine in such a manner that said profile parameter and said interaction identification string are communicated to a third party web site at which said profile parameter and said interaction identification string are stored.
14. A process as set forth in Claim 12 wherein said querying step includes the steps of:
- (a) querying said customer browser for a plurality of configuration settings;
 - (b) forming an attribute string from said plurality of configuration settings; and
 - (c) processing said attribute string to form said profile parameter of said customer computer.
15. A process as set forth in Claim 12 wherein said customer computer potentially accesses said merchant web site by way of a proxy, and said communicating step includes the steps of:
- (a) communicating said profile parameter and said transaction identification string to said remote web site using a protocol which bypasses said proxy.
16. A process for identifying a customer computer involved in an online transaction through a merchant web site between a customer using a customer browser

operating on said customer computer and a merchant who operates said web site, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) coding a script request within a transaction form of said merchant web site;
- (b) processing said script request by said customer browser upon accessing said merchant web site to thereby communicate to an archiver web site of a machine data archiving service an electronic request for a machine data collection script;
- (c) said archiver web site returning said script to said customer browser along with a unique transaction identification string;
- (d) said customer browser processing said script to thereby cause said script to query said customer computer for a profile parameter of said customer computer;
- (e) said script causing said customer browser to communicate said profile parameter and said transaction identification string to said archiver web site;
- (f) said archiver web site storing said profile parameter and said transaction identification string in a machine data profile;
- (g) said script causing said customer browser to write said transaction identification string into said transaction form; and
- (h) upon said customer adding customer identification information to said transaction form and electronically submitting said transaction form to said

merchant web site to thereby comprise a transaction record, said transaction identification string associating said transaction record with said machine data profile.

17. A process as set forth in Claim 16 and including the steps of:
 - (a) said script causing said computer browser to communicate said profile parameter and said transaction identification string along with a conventional hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) header; and
 - (b) said archiver service additionally storing said HTTP header in association with said machine data profile.
18. A process as set forth in Claim 16 and including the step of:
 - (a) said script querying said customer browser for a configuration setting thereof.
19. A process as set forth in Claim 16 and including the steps of:
 - (a) said script querying said customer browser for a plurality of configuration settings;
 - (b) said script forming an attribute string from said plurality of configuration settings; and

- (c) said script processing said attribute string to form said profile parameter of said customer computer.

20. A process as set forth in Claim 19 wherein said script processing step includes the step of:

- (a) said script performing a hashing function on said attribute string to form said profile parameter.

21. A process as set forth in Claim 16 wherein said customer computer potentially accesses said merchant web site by way of a proxy, and including the step of:

- (a) said script communicating said profile parameter and said transaction identification string to said archiver service web site using a protocol which bypasses said proxy.

22. A process as set forth in Claim 16 and including the step of:

- (a) said script communicating said profile parameter to said archiver service web site using a protocol other than HTTP.

23. A process as set forth in Claim 16 wherein said customer computer includes a digital clock, and including the steps of:

- (a) said script causing said customer browser to query said clock for a time value; and
- (b) said script causing said customer browser to send said time value to said archiver service web site along with said profile parameter.

24. A process for identifying a customer computer involved in an online transaction through a merchant web site between a customer using a customer browser operating on said customer computer and a merchant who operates said web site, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) coding a script request within a transaction form of said merchant web site;
- (b) processing said script request by said customer browser upon accessing said merchant web site to thereby communicate to an archiver web site of a machine data archiving service an electronic request for a machine data collection script;
- (c) said archiver web site returning said script to said customer browser along with a unique transaction identification string;
- (d) said customer browser processing said script to thereby cause said script to:
 - (1) query said customer browser for a plurality of configuration settings;
 - (2) form an attribute string from said plurality of configuration settings;

- (3) perform a hashing function on said attribute string to form said profile parameter; and
- (4) query an internal digital clock of said customer computer for a current time value;
- (e) said script causing said customer browser to communicate said profile parameter, said time value, and said transaction identification string to said archiver web site along with a conventional HTTP header;
- (f) said archiver web site storing said profile parameter, said time value, and said transaction identification string in a machine data profile;
- (g) said script causing said customer browser to write said transaction identification string into said transaction form; and
- (h) upon said customer adding customer identification information to said transaction form and electronically submitting said transaction form to said merchant web site to thereby comprise a transaction record, said transaction identification string associating said transaction record with said machine data profile.

25. A process as set forth in Claim 24 wherein said customer computer potentially accesses said merchant web site by way of a proxy, and including the steps of:

- (a) said script querying said customer computer for a second profile parameter; and

- (b) said script communicating said second profile parameter and said transaction identification string to said archiver service web site using a protocol which bypasses said proxy.

26. A process as set forth in Claim 25 and including the step of:

- (a) said script communicating said second profile parameter to said archiver service web site using a protocol other than HTTP.